

ASD-EAST – mapping activity

- Initial activity focused on the mapping the ‘state of the art’ regarding existing models and practice regarding teacher education in ASD, as well as identifying the current knowledge, attitudes and training needs of teachers.
- University of Northampton reviewed the literature regarding teacher education in ASD in general (*Lessner Lištiaková & Preece, 2020, in press*).
- Partners from Croatia, Republic of North Macedonia and Poland reviewed local policy and practice.
- The literature review informed the development of a structured questionnaire designed to identify the knowledge, confidence and training needs of specialist educators in Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland.

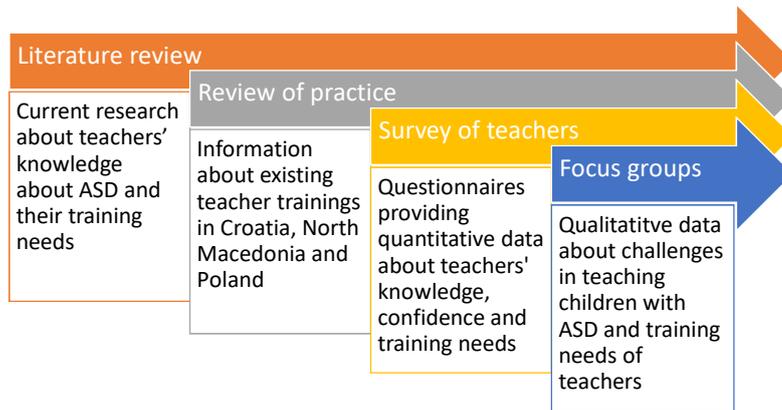


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Hello, this is David Preece again, Project Coordinator of the ASD-EAST project. In this presentation I’m going to talk about the initial mapping activity that we undertook in order to inform and develop our training programme and materials. This initial mapping was a multi-phase activity. To begin with, staff from the University of Northampton undertook a literature review regarding teacher training in autism, to look at what previous researchers had identified. At the same time partners from Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland reviewed local policy and practice. As well as providing important information regarding the current ‘state of the art’, this activity informed the development of a structured questionnaire, which was designed to identify the knowledge, confidence and training needs of specialist educators in Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland with regard to autism, and teaching children on the autism spectrum.

Initial mapping activity



So, as this slide illustrates, the initial mapping comprised four phases.

The literature review, led by the University of Northampton

The review of current practice.

Then, teachers' views were obtained in two ways.

Firstly, quantitative data was collected by way of a survey of teachers, with structured questionnaires harvesting data about teachers' knowledge, confidence and training needs.

At the same time, focus groups were undertaken in Zagreb, Skopje and Krakow with both special education and mainstream teachers, gathering qualitative data about challenges in teaching children with ASD and teachers' training needs.

Literature review: key themes

| Theme | Area of skill |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' knowledge, skills and confidence | Teaching skills (general) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication and social skills of students with ASD Managing challenging behaviour of students with ASD Adaptations and modifications of teaching and learning for students with ASD | Specialised teaching skills |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with other teachers Collaboration with other professionals Collaboration with families | Collaboration skills |



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When we analysed the literature, our analysis identified three major themes emerging from the literature.

Firstly, studies of teachers undertaken across the globe identified a general shortfall in skill regarding teaching learners with autism.

Teachers lacked knowledge regarding autism, they lacked skills in working with such children, and they lacked confidence in their abilities to work effectively with them. Furthermore, there were specific areas where teachers identified a need for specialised skills and training.

Three key areas identified related to supporting the communication and social skills development of learners on the spectrum; managing challenging behaviour; and making appropriate adaptations and modifications (of the curriculum, teaching methods, and the environment) to meet the needs of these children.

Finally, it was acknowledged that teachers did not have all the answers, and that they could not address all issues themselves in isolation.

Therefore, the need to work effectively in collaboration with colleagues in the classroom and school, with other professionals and – of course – with parents and families, was identified as another critical theme.

ASD-EAST – survey of teachers

- The questionnaire collected quantitative data regarding:
 - teachers' knowledge and understanding of ASD
 - their attitudes towards different types of educational approaches in ASD (and the extent to which they are used)
 - their confidence in addressing the educational needs of such childrentheir evaluation of their own training needs
- Distributed to teachers between November 2018 and February 2019: in total 560 questionnaires were distributed and 340 were returned. After data cleansing, the sample comprised 294 usable responses (103 from Croatia, 73 from the Republic of North Macedonia, 118 from Poland)
- In addition, focus groups gathered qualitative data from teachers in special education and mainstream/inclusive settings from Krakow, Skopje and Zagreb in December 2018.
- Article on quantitative aspects under review (*Lisak et al.*)



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A questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data regarding teachers' knowledge and understanding of autism, their attitudes towards different types of educational approaches that were commonly used in autism (and the extent to which they are used), their confidence in addressing the educational needs of such children and to identify their evaluation of their own training needs.

The questionnaire was distributed to specialist educators across Croatia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Poland between November 2018 and February 2019.

In total, 560 questionnaires were distributed and 340 were returned.

After data cleansing was undertaken to remove incomplete questionnaires, or those from respondents who did not meet sample criteria, the sample comprised 294 usable responses (103 from Croatia, 73 from the Republic of North Macedonia, 118 from Poland)

In addition, focus groups gathered qualitative data from teachers in special education and mainstream/inclusive settings from Krakow, Skopje and Zagreb in December 2018.

ASD-EAST survey – who responded?

- Respondents – n = 294: 94% were female, 6% male
- Age: 41% were 20-35, 44% were 36-50, 14% were over 50
- 53% worked in special schools, 47% in mainstream/inclusive schools
- 93% worked in urban settings, 7% in rural areas
- 80% had an MA or higher degree, 20% had a BA
- Experience: <1 year: 29%; 1-5 yrs: 32%; 6-10 yrs: 19%; >10 yrs: 20%



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With regard to the survey respondents, 94% were female, which is representative of teachers in this field in these countries. Just over two-fifths were under 35, with a similar number aged 36-50, and just 14% aged over 50. There was a good balance between special and mainstream respondents – 53% worked in special schools and 47% in mainstream settings. The vast majority (93%) worked in urban settings. Just 7% of teachers, drawn from the mainstream population, worked in rural areas. Teachers were generally highly qualified and had experience of working in autism. 80% had a Masters’ or doctoral degree, which is indicative of the teacher training systems, particularly in Croatia and Poland. All teachers were educated to at least Bachelor’s level. Just under 30% of teachers had less than a year’s experience, while 32% had between a year and five years’ experience; just under 20% between six- and ten-years’ experience; and a similar number over 10 years’ experience.

Teachers' attitudes and understanding

- **Some respondents held narrow, stereotypical or factually inaccurate understandings regarding autism**
 - 53% thought most or all individuals with autism cannot make eye contact
 - 38% thought children with autism do not want friends
 - 17% thought they have no emotions
- **Differences in attitude between the three countries**
 - 73% Croatian and 53% North Macedonia respondents thought children with autism could not be educated alongside mainstream peers
- **Mainstream teachers were more likely to**
 - hold **inaccurate beliefs** – such as that children could 'grow out' of ASD (33% vs 19%)
 - hold **pessimistic views** regarding the education of children with ASD
 - minimise the importance of **specialised approaches**



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Respondents' replies showed that some teachers held narrow, stereotypical or factually inaccurate understandings regarding autism.

For example, 53% thought most or all individuals with autism cannot make eye contact, 38% thought children with autism do not want friends and 17% thought they have no emotions

There were differences in attitude between the three countries, and also between special education and mainstream teachers.

Overall, mainstream teachers were more likely to hold inaccurate beliefs about autism, hold pessimistic views regarding the education of children on the spectrum and to consider specialised approaches to be less important.

Previous training

- 66% had received training about ASD at university; 66% had received further training – BUT mostly **theoretical**
- Fewer than 60% had received any training in **teaching methods**
- Even fewer had received **practical experience** while training

| Content of training | Theory about autism | Teaching and intervention methods | Practical experience |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| | 205 (69.7%) | 169 (57.5%) | 125 (42.5%) |



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With regard to previous training, two thirds of respondents had received training about autism at university; and the same number had received further training. However, such training was largely theoretical: fewer than 60% had received any training in teaching methods, and even fewer had received practical experience while training.

Training and perceived competence regarding specific approaches

- Though almost 58% said they received some training, the survey revealed
 - **very low overall training in commonly used approaches** (10-25%)
 - **even lower confidence** in their use (1-8%)
 - special school teachers scored slightly higher than mainstream school teachers



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Furthermore, although just under 58% said they received some training, the survey revealed very low overall training in commonly used approaches (between 10-25%) and even lower confidence in their use (1-8%). Special school teachers had received more training, and expressed more confidence, than mainstream teachers.

Examples of specific approaches

| Specific approach | Received training | Feel confident | Using approach sometimes/everyday |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| TEACCH | 15.3% | 6.5% | 71.8% |
| Social stories | 15.6% | 5.1% | 79.9% |
| AAC: signing, PECS | 23.2% | 8.2% | 60.9% |
| Social skills | 11.6% | 4.1% | 84.5% |
| ABA | 13.3% | 5.1% | 79.2% |
| Sensory approaches | 17.7% | 6.8% | 78.6% |



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So, for example, only about 15% of respondents had received any training in the TEACCH approach, and only 6.5% felt confident in using the approach.

A similar number had received training in Social Stories, with just over 5% feeling confident in using them.

But as the third column shows, these methods were in common use in the classroom, with, for example, social stories being used either sometimes or daily in almost 80% of classrooms, and TEACCH being used in over 70%.

• ASD-appropriate strategies – training and use

- Despite the low levels of training and confidence, many specific approaches used within the three countries
- Higher use of specific approaches in ASD in special schools than in mainstream schools
- Many teachers are using specific approaches either without training or without feeling confident in their use.



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This was an important finding.

That despite the low levels of training and confidence, many specific approaches were nevertheless in frequent within the three countries.

There was higher use of specific approaches in autism in special schools than in mainstream schools, but many teachers are using these specific approaches either without training or without feeling confident in their use.

Confidence in dealing with typical issues and challenges

- Lowest areas of confidence:
 - managing anxiety (31%)
 - supporting turn-taking (33%)
 - addressing sensory needs (36%)
 - responding to behaviour and emotions (37%)
- Special education teachers generally more confident than mainstream teachers
 - Over half of mainstream teachers unconfident in all areas
 - Over half of special school teachers confident in $\leq 30\%$ of areas
- More than 90% of all teachers expressed desire for further training, based around **practical strategies**
- **Focus group findings confirmed results of survey**



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We asked teachers how confident they felt in addressing some of the issues and challenges that are often faced in teaching children with autism.

We found a number of areas where teachers felt unconfident.

For example, only 31% of teachers felt confident in managing children's anxiety and only 36% in supporting and addressing children's sensory needs.

Special education teachers generally more confident than mainstream teachers.

Over half of mainstream teachers were unconfident regarding all of the issues and challenges identified; while more than half of the special school teachers were confident in 30% or fewer of the areas.

The focus group discussions confirmed teachers' low confidence, and their need for support and training, and over 90% of all teachers expressed desire for further training, based around practical strategies.



The information we gathered in mapping activity informed the development of the ASD-EAST training programme and materials.
In the next presentation, my colleague Ivana Lessner Listiakova will talk more about the programme and materials.

• Thanks

- Thanks to my colleagues who led on the mapping activity in the three countries:
 - Drs Jasmina Stošić & Natalija Lisak Šegota, University of Zagreb
 - Dr Jasmina Troshanska, Autism Macedonia Blue Firefly
 - Prof Joanna Kossewska and colleagues, Pedagogical University of Krakow
- Particular thanks to Dr Natalija Lisak Šegota who led on the data analysis process and to Dr Ivana Lessner Listiakova who led on the literature review



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It is important at this point to thank my colleagues who led on the mapping activity in the three countries:

Drs Jasmina Stošić & Natalija Lisak Šegota in Croatia, Dr Jasmina Troshanska in Skopje, and Prof Joanna Kossewska and her colleagues in Poland. Particular thanks go to Dr Natalija Lisak Šegota who led on the data analysis process and to Dr Ivana Lessner Listiakova who led on the literature review.

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